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## AICMA: Helping Central America

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## AICMA: Helping Central America

Since its creation in 1998, Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines (AICMA) has been devoted to numerous landmine issues. AICMA and its partners have accomplished a great deal throughout the continent.

■ Beautiful yet dangerous terrain near the Honduran border. c/o Central America Landmine Survivors Project



### by Organization of American States (OAS)

*This report describes the activities conducted by AICMA. Between June 2000 and May 2001, periodic reports were provided to the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the OAS Permanent Council on the work completed and the use of allocated funds.*

### Introduction

To address the complex, difficult and persistent issues related to the crisis caused by anti-personnel mines, the program known as "Comprehensive Action Against Anti-personnel Mines" (AICMA) was created in the Unit for

the Promotion of Democracy in 1998. This program is the focal point within the General Secretariat for landmine issues and covers the following topics:

- mine risk awareness education for the civilian population
- support for minefield surveying, mapping, marking and clearance
- victim assistance, including physical and psychological rehabilitation and the socioeconomic reintegration of cleared zones
- destruction of stockpiled mines
- support for a total ban on the use, production, stockpile and sale, transport or export of anti-personnel mines

At its 30<sup>th</sup> regular session, the General Assembly approved resolutions AG/RES. 1745 (XXX-O/00), "Support for Action Against Mines in Peru and Ecuador" and AG/RES. 1751 (XXX-O/00), "Support for the Program of Integral Action Against Anti-personnel Mines in Central America."

### Assistance Program for Demining in Central America (PADCA)

#### Background

PADCA was created by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1991, at the request of the Central

American countries affected by anti-personnel mines. Since May 1995, responsibility for the general coordination and supervision of PADCA has been assigned to the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD), with the technical support of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB). The distinctive feature of PADCA, which is an integral component of the AICMA program, is that it is largely a humanitarian project, since it seeks to restore safe conditions and the confidence of citizens, to reduce the threat and danger posed by explosive devices and antipersonnel mines, and to restore the use of the lands dedicated to agriculture and livestock in affected zones. Furthermore, it is a multilateral program, since a number of donor and contributing countries (such as Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, El Salvador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Holland, Honduras, Japan, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United States, and Venezuela) and various organizations (such as the OAS and the IADB) participate in it.

#### Role of the UPD

The main responsibilities of the UPD/OAS within PADCA are to raise funds in the international community, to administer and oversee the use of those funds and to coordinate the Program from a political and diplomatic standpoint. This responsibility also includes the task of ensuring that all the essential components of each national demining project are in place and functioning properly. This includes a system for communications, evacuation and emergency; the provision of food and equipment for demining troops; insurance; and a stipend for all supervisors and sapper soldiers involved in operations and awareness-building campaigns designed to educate populations about the latent risk of anti-personnel mines.

#### Technical Assistance

The IADB is responsible for organizing the international team of supervisors in the four countries participating in the Program (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). At the moment, the international team of experts is composed of about 30 supervisors who are responsible for providing technical and logistical support, training demining troops, and providing certification that demining operations are appropriate and meet international safety standards. In September, Guatemala became the first PADCA beneficiary country to provide the chief of the international supervisory team, known as the Mission of Assistance for the Removal of Mines in Central America (MARMINCA). The change in leadership followed the training and integration of new military supervisors from the seven OAS Member States (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela).

#### International Support

The successful work completed and progress achieved by PADCA is, in large measure, due to the invaluable and generous support of member states such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela and the United States, as well as the contributions of major international donors, including Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation, South Korea, Spain and Sweden. Over the course of one year, these contributions have amounted to approximately \$6 million (U.S.).

#### Coordination with International Entities

##### • United Nations

Significant cooperation with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) on several mine action projects enhanced both the coordina-

tion and execution of the AICMA program over the past year. The establishment of a mine action database was made possible by a grant from UNMAS, which supported computer software, training and initial operation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). This system, which was developed under the sponsorship of the Swiss Government for the benefit of the international community, was installed and is maintained in the PADCA office in Nicaragua. Important progress was also made in coordinating UNMAS and AICMA program support for the mine action programs in Peru and Ecuador.

##### • Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

GICHD, as the organization designated by UNMAS to coordinate and revise International Mine Action Standards, has worked directly with the AICMA program to establish a user focus group for review and comment on draft standards. The first phase of this review took place in Managua in January 2001 and was attended by demining program managers from Central America, Ecuador and Peru.

##### • Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)

During the course of the year, AICMA coordinated closely with PAHO with the aim of working cooperatively on activities related to assistance, rehabilitation and integration of mine victims, as well as on awareness education of the population about the danger of these devices.

##### • Trust for the Americas

In order to promote victim assistance initiatives, the Program established and broadened contact with the Trust for the Americas, seeking to cement collaboration with the private, public and academic sectors, as well as with different civil society institutions in the hemisphere.



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- Central American Bank for Economic Integration

During this period, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and the OAS, through AICMA, continued joint efforts on issues related to mine risk/accident prevention education and socio-economic recovery of communities that have been demined. In that regard, the Bank contributed funds to support mine accident prevention campaigns in Honduras and Nicaragua. Similarly, a workshop will be conducted to analyze the socio-economic impact on mine-affected communities in Central America. The primary objective of the workshop will be to consolidate information about the devastating effects of mines on the population in order to be presented at the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which will take place in Managua, Nicaragua, in September 2001.

- Center for International Rehabilitation

The Center for International Rehabilitation, the Guatemalan Rehabilitation Association, the Center for the Promotion of Integrated Rehabilitation, the Cooperative Association of the Independent Group for Total Rehabilitation, the Landmine Survivors Network and the OAS jointly edited and distributed the Regional Rehabilitation Resources Directory, which was made available in April 2000. The directory provides information on existing rehabilitation facilities in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

- International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)

The AICMA program maintained frequent contact with the ICBL and participated in the Campaign's annual meeting in Washington from 5-9 March 2001 with a presentation by the program coordinator. In addition, the OAS, through AICMA, co-sponsored a reception at the Main

Building of the OAS in honor of Ms. Jody Williams, corecipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace, and Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan.

### *Demining Activities*

From June 2000 to May 2001, PADCA-supported demining activities continued to expand in size and scope. Generally, mine clearance operations remain affected by the passage of Hurricane Mitch through Central America in October 1998, as erosion caused the movement of an undetermined number of mines and explosive devices from their original locations. However, emergency response plans to clear key infrastructure have been completed. Members of the international team provided training courses for new demining units in Nicaragua, as well as refresher training for existing units in each of the four Central American beneficiary countries. Additional technical equipment, vehicles and spare parts for medical evacuation helicopters were also provided through donor funding. Efforts to integrate canine mine detection capabilities continued in December when PADCA took over the contractor's responsibility of supporting the canine component, which had previously been financed by the U.S. government. The number of dogs assigned to the program now stands at 19, with 11 in Nicaragua, four in Honduras and four in Costa Rica.

### *Progress Made in Each PADCA-Recipient Country*

- Costa Rica

During the year 2000, Costa Rican deminers cleared more than 104,000 sq. m of land along the border with Nicaragua, making these areas available for agricultural use. However, the pace of operations was slowed due to the lack of a medical evacuation helicopter, forcing demining units to work only in areas that are accessible by light airplane. The Costa

Rican Red Cross was helpful in arranging for ground evacuation by providing an ambulance to reinforce the capabilities of the demining unit. The Ministry of Public Security, which is the national mine action authority for Costa Rica, revised the projected completion date for mine clearance to June 2002.

- Guatemala

PADCA-supported demining operations continue with the participation of the Volunteer Firemen's Corps, the Guatemalan Army, reintegrated members of the former insurgent organization (URNG) and international supervisors from the Inter-American Defense Board. In accordance with the Guatemalan National Plan for Demining and Destruction of Unexploded Ordnance, demining activities were concentrated in the municipality of Nebaj, Quiché Department, one of the most seriously affected areas of the country. Because of the heavy concentration of undetonated explosive devices found in many parts of Guatemala and the lack of a documented registry for them, extensive efforts are required to identify hazardous areas through an integrated mine risk awareness campaign. This campaign has been conducted by the firemen and demobilized insurgents in conjunction with clearance operations in order to solicit information on these hazards from people living in the most affected areas. Coverage and clearance of all high-priority areas is scheduled for completion in 2005.

- Honduras

Mine clearance operations entered their final six-month module in March of this year for the last remaining mined areas along the border with Nicaragua in Choluteca Department. During 2000, Honduran deminers and international supervisors con-

ducted two important general surveys to determine the probability of the existence of mined areas along the border with El Salvador and near a former military base at Aguacate in Olancho Department. In both cases, there was no indication from local authorities or inhabitants that any mines were present. These surveys confirmed that the conclusion of the current Module X in September 2001 will complete demining of the Honduran side of the border with Nicaragua. As the program closes in Honduras, international supervisors will continue to assist with quality control inspections using canine mine detection in those areas that were cleared prior to the start of the canine program in 1999.

- Nicaragua

Nicaraguan demining units destroyed over 70 percent of the mines scheduled for detection and destruction for the year 2000. By January 2001, the Nicaraguan Army reported that of more than 135,000 mines originally emplaced, about 73,000 remain to be destroyed. These results were obtained using both manual detection methods and canine mine detection. Two factors that limited the ability of demining units to meet projected clearance goals were weather in affected areas and the availability of medical evacuation helicopters to provide continuous coverage of operations. As a result of donor funding, PADCA will support the rehabilitation of an additional helicopter, which will increase the total number in support to four and will permit adequate support to demining units throughout Nicaragua.

PADCA continued to provide funding for the demining activities of two 100-member demining units (Operational Fronts 3 and 4) and for two new units. In June 2000, the Nicaraguan Army initiated operations with 100 sappers of the newly-organized

and trained Operational Front 5 in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN). In addition, the newly formed Independent Demining Platoon consisting of 60 deminers was trained and placed into operation in January 2001 to assume responsibility for landmine stockpile destruction, mine field marking and quick reaction to reports of mines and unexploded ordnance from local communities. Two hundred sappers assigned to Operational Fronts 1 and 2 also came under the supervision of the IADB international team in 2001, even though they were funded through bilateral arrangements with the Government of Denmark. These changes brought the total number of deminers working with PADCA to about 635 and extended clearance operations to all mine-affected geographic regions of the country. To complement manual and canine assets, a mechanical mine clearance capability will be added by using equipment provided by the Government of Japan in 2001. In view of these developments, the goal of the Nicaraguan Government continues to be completion of its National Demining Plan by the end of 2004.

### *Mine Awareness Education*

The mine awareness programs supported by AICMA aim not only to reduce the risk of death and injury by promoting safe behavior, but also to facilitate solutions to the high-risk behavior that we have noticed in some of the affected communities. The program recognizes the importance of increasing the involvement of these communities in mine awareness initiatives. In the case of Central America, it is important to highlight the double benefit obtained by the participation of the affected communities in landmine awareness activities. Not only do the community members learn about the danger of landmines; but also, in specific cases where no landmine records exist, the communities are the

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main sources of information for the location of the mined areas and explosive devices. The Mine Risk Awareness Education for the Civilian Population campaign was strengthened through community visits, school programs and a variety of national radio messages. In each of the recipient countries, PADCA personnel visited schools in affected areas to provide mine risk awareness classes and distribute informational material.

In Nicaragua, the Ministry of Defense, the Nicaraguan Army and PADCA Nicaragua held two seminars for student councils of schools identified by the Ministry of Education in each region of the country. Participants included secondary school students who attended a course on mine awareness and precautionary measures in order to enable them to convey this information in their own schools and communities.

PADCA also signed an agreement with UNICEF for the development of a joint project to support mine risk education and landmine accident prevention to be targeted toward children in Nicaragua in 2001. Considering the magnitude of the problem in Nicaragua, a national workshop has been planned in Managua for later this year in order to discuss standardizing criteria and materials used in mine risk education campaigns by the numerous institutions involved in this field in Nicaragua. Two seminars that will focus on community radio stations are also planned in different regions of the country.

Efforts to use local and national communications media were supported by PADCA throughout the region. In Costa Rica, a radio campaign was initiated using a local radio station in the affected area around Los Chiles, and the Univision network broadcast a television program on the problems of anti-personnel mines in Costa Rica. A similar campaign was used in Honduras with two local ra-



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radio stations in the municipality of San Marcos de Colon, Choluteca Department. PADCA supported the initiation of a continuing nation-wide radio campaign in Nicaragua with Radio Corporación, using a character from a popular national program, "Pacho Madrigal," to convey mine awareness messages. The Latin American system, Telemundo, visited and filmed the program's activities in Nicaragua to broadcast during its newscast. In Guatemala, PADCA received an award from UNICEF for a public awareness campaign it developed entitled "No Juguemos con la Muerte" ("Let's Not Play with Death!") in October 2000.

### Victim Assistance

The "Program for Care to Victims of Mines and Explosive Devices," which has existed in Nicaragua since 1997, was continued and strengthened in the past year with the assistance of the Swedish government. Since its inception, the program has addressed the specific needs of the communities involved by providing victims who have no social security or army benefits with transportation from their communities to the rehabilitation center, as well as lodging, nourishment, prostheses, therapy and medications. The program maintains victims' records that include information concerning personal identification, home community, type of injury, type of prosthesis, account of the accident, and in most cases, photographs of the victim. The humanitarian work under this program, with an overall budget of \$275,000, has provided care for about 300 persons who otherwise would have no chance of rehabilitation and reintegration into productive life in their communities. In addition, limited immediate medical support has been provided to mine accident survivors using medical personnel and resources assigned to each of the Nicaraguan demining units until the vic-

tims could be assisted through the OAS Victim Assistance Program. In the past year, the program's rehabilitation center in Nicaragua also assisted two mine victims from Costa Rica, who received medical treatment, prostheses and meals.

In Guatemala, the program has also supported a program operating an independent living center that is presently home to several disabled young people, who range in age from 14 to 35. They receive basic medical treatment, counseling and vocational and educational training. They are also trained in independent living, a philosophy that states that with the right skills, tools and information, a person with a disability is capable of directing his or her own care and leading a productive and happy life. The program also provides services to the disabled community by offering counseling and case management, peer support groups and a resource library.

### Stockpile Destruction

The role of the AICMA program in promoting the elimination of stockpiled anti-personnel mines in the Western Hemisphere has expanded significantly over the past year. In collaboration with the government of Canada, the program hopes to raise \$1 million from international donors, who will manage support efforts by requesting Member States to destroy their stockpiles prior to the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in Managua this September. This project, known as the "Managua Challenge," encompasses the destruction of all stockpiled mines by the Ottawa Convention signatories of the Americas and the finalization and presentation of all reports required under Article 7 of the Convention before the Managua meeting in September.

To that end, the Nicaraguan government continued the effort initiated in 1999 to destroy all of the original

130,000 warehoused mines under its control. Representatives of PADCA and the IADB international supervisor team participated in the certification of the destruction of additional mines in the Department of Estelí, bringing the total number of stockpiled mines destroyed to 68,859 by the end of 2000. Nicaragua has set the destruction phase of remaining stocks to be completed as soon as possible and hopefully by September 2001.

In November 2000, the Honduran government completed the elimination of its entire inventory of mines. A total of 7,741 anti-personnel mines were destroyed by the Honduran Armed Forces with financial support from AICMA and the technical advice of the IADB and the Canadian government. As in Nicaragua, representatives of the program and the international team of supervisors certified the process that made Honduras the first of the States Parties of the Americas to fulfill this aspect of the Ottawa Convention.

### Mine Action Database

In collaboration with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), a mine action database program was initiated in Nicaragua in October 2000. Personnel of PADCA Nicaragua and the international supervisors received training from GICHD on the computerized system, known as the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). IMSMA permits the entry of data on all known and suspected mined areas, their characteristics, the status of mine clearance in each area, and complete information on accidents and mine victims. The primary purpose is to assist in prioritizing mine action efforts according to a set of criteria for determining the greatest need. In the future, data for Honduras and Costa Rica will also

be added, and plans for establishing separate databases in Peru and Ecuador are underway.

### Peru and Ecuador

General Assembly resolution AG/RES. 1745 (XXVX-O/00), "Support for Action Against Mines in Peru and Ecuador," states that the General Secretariat should pursue negotiations with the governments of Ecuador and Peru, setting their sights on the earliest possible conclusion of the framework agreements to initiate demining assistance to those Member States. In that regard, bilateral meetings were held with representatives of the governments of Peru and Ecuador, and also with the principal donors of the eventual program to support demining in these countries during the Second Meeting of States Parties. The Organization submitted working documents for consideration by both governments containing a proposal to provide coordinated international assistance with the efforts of both countries in integrated action against anti-personnel mines in their respective territories.

The fundamental objective of this proposal is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity, to conduct humanitarian demining tasks, and to promote dialogue with the national authorities of each country in establishing standards, entities to be involved, a general operations framework, financing needs, composition of demining units, and a tentative schedule of operations. These actions will pave the way for the development of a Comprehensive Program of Action against Anti-personnel Mines in both countries and develop a preliminary consensus regarding the international community's commitment to financial assistance. The primary objective of this program will be to ensure that priority is given to the location, demarcation, recording and destruction of anti-personnel mines; to develop

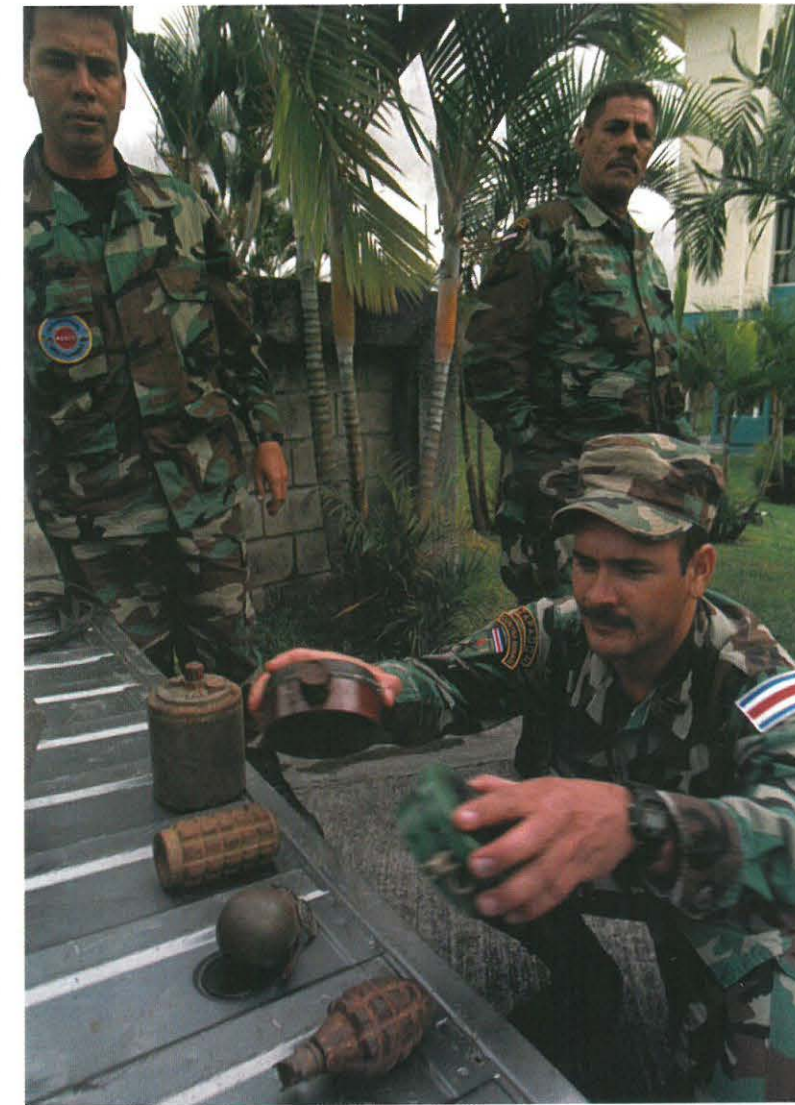
and apply appropriate technologies for the detection and destruction of mines that threaten the civilian population; to effectively build awareness among the civil population regarding the danger of these devices; to assist victims; and to restore land to productive use.

An agreement to support a program in Ecuador was finalized in March 2001, with the initial phase of activities focusing on an accelerated stockpile destruction process. Ecuador and Peru have both expressed interest in carrying out accelerated stockpile destruction with international assistance. Ecuador submitted its action plan and budget in February 2001, and arrangements on this initiative were also finalized in March. The framework agreement for a Peru/OAS program is currently undergoing what may be a final legal review. In each case, the international community has provided or promised more than \$1 million to get the programs under way.

The Organization has maintained a specific fund for the Program for Demining Assistance in Ecuador/Peru (PADEP) using \$300,000 (CAN [= \$198,800.45 U.S.]) in contributions from the government of Canada in April 1999. This contribution, which was divided equally, has been used exclusively for the purchase of equipment and materials for activities to support humanitarian demining associated with the demarcation of the border between Ecuador and Peru.

It is important to underscore the recommendation of the United Na-

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tions regarding the multilateral coordination of this humanitarian effort, with emphasis being placed on the capacity of the OAS in doing this coordination work with the assistance of the United Nations. ■

### Contact Information

Organization of American States  
Unit for the Promotion of Democracy  
1889 F Street, N.W., 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
Tel: (202) 458-3589  
Fax: (202) 458-6250  
Website: [www.upd.oas.org/demining](http://www.upd.oas.org/demining)

■ Members of Lt. Yunen Granados' unit watch as he prepares various explosive devices and landmines for a demonstration. c/o AP